

Making Life Easier Program

A Healthy Start



Traditionally, at the start of a new year, we make resolutions and plans for a healthier and more prosperous year. It is a time to set goals and make changes. If you want to develop a healthier lifestyle there are ways to get beyond the phase of setting goals and actually develop healthy habits. Even though making changes can be challenging the tips below will help you get started.

Identify your goals and break each goal down into small manageable steps. Is your goal to stop smoking, exercise on a regular basis, lose 20 pounds, or eat healthier? For example, instead of attempting to run 2 miles your first day of a running program, start small and gradually build up to running 2 miles (or more, depending on your goal) since muscle soreness and fatigue can cause you to lose interest quickly.

Make a plan and set a date to begin your lifestyle change. If eating healthier is a goal, clean out your cupboards, make a list of the healthy foods you want to incorporate into your diet, and go shopping. Even small changes can add up over time to improve your health. If your goal is to stop smoking, throw out all cigarettes, lighters, etc.

Track your habits by keeping a log of personal habits (e.g., food intake, activity level, and smoking habits) and *when* these habits occur. This log can then help you to identify stressors that may tempt you to want to revert back to an old habit, or to not pursue your new activity. On the other hand, you may also get a boost of confidence when you are reminded of your successful days, or a surge of motivation for those not so successful days.

Overcome obstacles that might keep you from obtaining your goals. Know in advance what you will do should you be faced with a difficult situation. If invited to a function where food will be served, plan in advance what you will and will not eat. If it is a rainy day and you happen to exercise outside, have an alternative exercise plan already in place.

Reward yourself with something you enjoy when you have achieved a goal. Make sure this reward encourages rather than undermines your new healthy habit. For example, if your goal is to lose weight, don't reward yourself with a piece of cake. Instead, treat yourself to new running shoes, etc.

Be sure to check with your healthcare professional before beginning any new exercise plan, weight loss plan, or before taking any new medications to help with smoking cessation.

References: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3039981>

The King County Making Life Easier Program with services provided by APS Healthcare is available to help employees and household members cope with a variety of life problems. For confidential assistance call toll free 1-888-874-7290.



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